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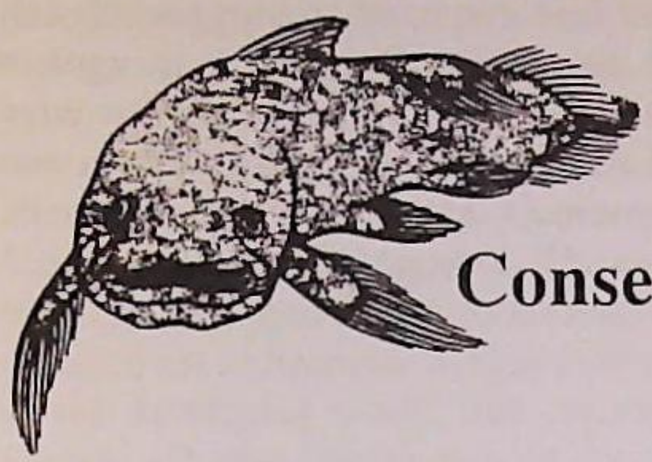

Coelacanth Conservation Council

Conseil pour la Conservation du Coelacanthe

Founded in April 1987
in Moroni, Comoros

Newsletter no. 6
April 1999

Secretariat at the MTN ScienCentre, 1 Waterford Place,
Century City, Milnerton 7441, Cape Town, South Africa.

News from the CCC Secretariat

Winston Churchill once called a backbencher, who remained silent for nearly twenty years in the British House of Lords and then got up to make a great speech, 'that coelacanth of a man'. Since then the coelacanth has become a metanym for someone or something that rises up from the past with a great message to tell. True to form, the Coelacanth Conservation Council (CCC) newsletter has performed the same phoenix-like transformation; after being moribund for five years, while the editor was employed at a busy commercial aquarium in Cape Town, the newsletter has responded with alacrity to the discovery of coelacanths in Indonesia and will resume its services to coelacanthophiles worldwide.

Since the last newsletter was published in December 1993, the world has changed dramatically, especially with respect to information technology. Information on the coelacanth (and every other imaginable topic) is now readily available on the internet; the fun of establishing the first coelacanth internet site (http://www.dinofish.com) is described by Jerry Hamlin in this newsletter. We nevertheless thought that the CCC newsletter provides a unique, hardcopy service by updating the official coelacanth inventory and bibliography and by publishing interesting accounts of recent developments in coelacanth research and conservation. So we are resuming regular publication, thanks to 'raja laut'. In the future, the sequence of coelacanth specimens in the inventory of specimens will not be strictly chronological as information is often received on specimens long after they were caught; we nevertheless consider it worth recording all the specimens that come to our attention, in the order that they are reported to us.

The discovery of coelacanths in Indonesia has once again brought old fourlegs back into the forefront of scientific endeavor and into the public's imagination. While the charismatic megaherbivores continue to dominate the attention of traditional conservationists, informed observers are equally fascinated by the remarkable stories that the 'wet-and slimies' are able to tell. I doubt whether any lower vertebrate has ever captured the public's imagination to the same extent as the coelacanth, and now we have a whole new wave of excitement for a new generation of coelacanth fans. The coelacanth is an environmental educationist's dream and ichthyology's best public relations officer.

The Indonesian find not only reveals a new population of coelacanths but suggests that they may occur more widely in the Indian Ocean, and possibly elsewhere. This possibility will doubtless stimulate further interdisciplinary research expeditions to

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little-known parts of the tropics, with benefits to marine biology as a whole. Hopefully the new coelacanth hype will also benefit marine science and conservation in those African countries where *L. chalumnae* is already known to occur, i.e. Comoros, South Africa, Mozambique and Madagascar. The new find will also highlight the need for us to conduct more intensive research on indigenous fishing methods and catches in the developing world, and especially in oceanic islands; valuable information on these subjects is not reaching mainline scientists. It would also be highly desirable for the new interest in coelacanths to stimulate further deep-sea research using manned submersibles in the lesser known tropical oceans. While its newly-discovered distribution range may suggest that *L. chalumnae* is more widespread and less endangered than we originally thought, there is still an urgent need to study and conserve the different gene pools of coelacanths in the western and eastern ends of its known range. The recent discovery does, however, re-open the debate on whether we can justify capturing, studying and displaying a coelacanth in captivity.

Michael N. Bruton

Alterations and additions to the coelacanth inventory: IV

CCC no. 10: (10) *Sex*: on dissection this specimen was found to contain 197 eggs in three distinct size groups, numbering 58, 65 and 74 eggs. This information was recorded in the official records kept by Andre Lehr, Senior Administrative Officer on Anjouan island in the Comoros in the 1950s and made available to Robin Stobbs by Quentin Keynes, who personally collected the data in 1955. Eric Hunt, who brought the second (1952) coelacanth to JLB Smith's attention, also recorded these details on the eggs dissected from specimen CCC no. 10. Information provided by Robin Stobbs.

CCC no. 92 and 96: See Figures 1a and b depicting these specimens.

Information on coelacanth no. CCC 165–172 has been provided by Robin Stobbs of Grahamstown [caveat emptor].

CCC no. 165: (2) *Date of capture*: November 1991. (3) *Site of capture*: off Salimani, Grand Comoro. (8) *Weight*: 33 kg. (9) *Length*: 130 cm. (14) *First literature reference*: Hughes (1995). (16) *Additional comments*: Hughes (1995) dissected the gills of this specimen in Moroni, Grand Comoro, some six hours after its capture.

CCC no. 166: (2) *Date of capture*: 21.12.1991 at 23:00 h. (3) *Site of capture*: reportedly the outer edge of Recif du Sud near Choungui mountain near the southernmost promontory of Mayotte island, but there is some doubt about this locality. This would be the first record of a coelacanth from Mayotte. (6) *Depth of capture*: 550–600 m. (8) *Weight*: 78 kg. (9) *Length*: 178 cm; girth 105 cm. (10) *Sex*: female. This fish was reported by J.C. Renard, who owns the specimen, to have contained 10–12 pups measuring ca. 28 cm in total length. (16) *Additional notes*: J.C. Renard's address is: BP 15, 97600 Mamoudzou, Mayotte via Reunion.

CCC no. 167: (3) *Site of capture*: reputedly caught off Recif du Sud on the southernmost promontory of Mayotte island, but there is some doubt about this locality. (6) *Depth of capture*: 550 m. (8) *Weight*: 84 kg. (9) *Length*: 181 cm; girth 110 cm. (10) *Sex*: female. (16) *Additional notes*: This specimen is also in the possession of J.C. Renard, who lives in Mayotte.

CCC no. 168: (2) *Date of capture*: 12.5.1995 at 4:10 h. (3) *Site of capture*: Hahaya, Grand Comoro. (4) *Name of fisherman*: Moindjie Ramada and Maduhoda M'adi. (8) *Weight*: 84 kg. (9) *Length*: 178 cm. (11) *Condition on capture*: alive when landed, lived for a 'few hours' in a resuscitation tank. (15) *Current holding*: freezer of the Military Camp near Moroni, Grand Comoro. (16) *Additional comments*: according to Robin Stobbs, there is some doubt as to whether a resuscitation attempt was made on this specimen.

CCC no. 169: (2) *Date of capture*: 22.5.1995 at 24:40 h. (3) *Site of capture*: Singani, Grand Comoro. (4) *Name of fisherman*: Mohamede Bacrie and Mlozi Mauridi. (8) *Weight*: 76 kg. (9) *Length*: 145 cm. (11) *Condition on capture*: alive when landed, lived for a 'few hours' in a resuscitation tank. (15) *Current holding*: freezer of the Military Camp near Moroni, Grand Comoro. (16) *Additional comments*: according to Robin Stobbs, there is some doubt as to whether a resuscitation attempt was made on this specimen.

CCC no. 170: (2) *Date of capture*: 18.7.1995 at 3:30 h. (3) *Site of capture*: Iconi, Grand Comoro. (4) *Name of fisherman*: Ahmada Abdouy and Athoumane Mlozi. (8) *Weight*: 36 kg. (9) *Length*: 105 cm. (11) *Condition on capture*: alive, lived for three days in a resuscitation tank. (15) *Current holding*: freezer of the Military Camp near Moroni, Grand Comoro.

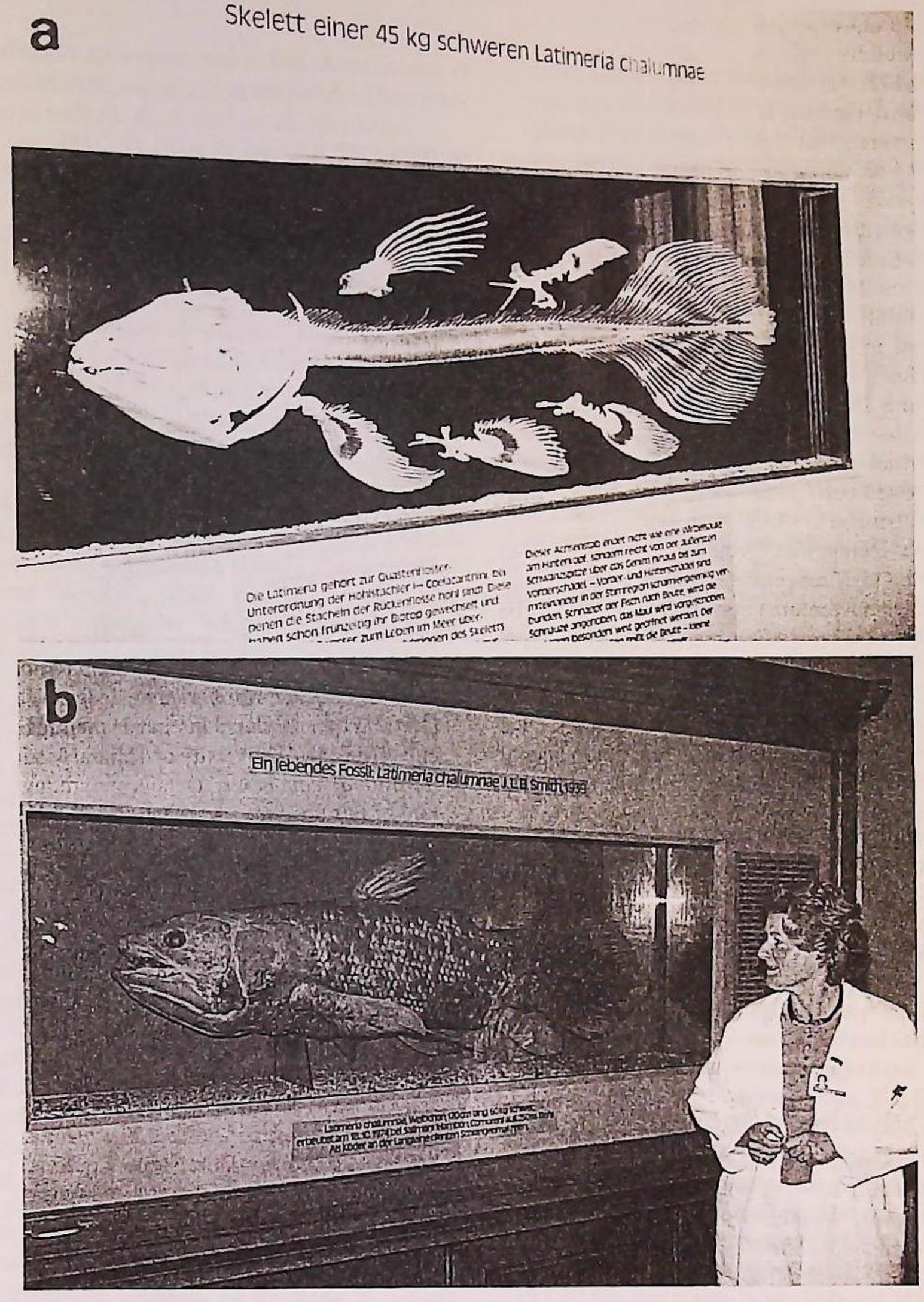

Figure 1. a – The skeleton of *Latimeria chalumnae* CCC no. 92, and b – the CCC no. 96 on public display at the Natural History Museum in Vienna, Austria. Photographs by E.K. Balon.

(16) *Additional comments*: the recent disturbances in and around Moroni, especially at the Kendani Barracks, do not bode well for these coelacanth specimens.

CCC no. 171: (2) *Date of capture*: 26.3.1995 at 1:30 h. (3) *Site of capture*: Hahaya, Grand Comoro. (4) *Name of fisherman*: Ali Ibrihim and Kassim Omaidi. (5) *Distance from shore at capture*: 800–1000 m. (6) *Depth of capture*: about 200 m. (7) *Bait used*: octopus. (8) *Weight*: 69 kg. (9) *Length*: 165 cm. (10) *Sex*: female. (11) *Condition on capture*: alive, lived until about 8:00 h on 26.3.1995. (12) *Method of preservation*: frozen until 19.8.95, then fixed in 10% formalin and preserved in 60% isopropyl alcohol. (13) *Condition*: excellent, gills red and firm, only six scales missing before dissection, specimen was dissected for display, the ovary contained numbers of developing egg follicles; the stomach contained a 550 mm partially-digested barracudina (family Paralepididae), local name 'tsumbu', which was left in situ, visible through a rectangular 'window' cut through the stomach wall. (15) *Current holding*: collected by Guy Fotherby of 'Island Ventures'; on permanent public display in the Island Ventures Boathouse and Dive School at the Le Galawa Beach Hotel, near Mitsamiouli, Grand Comoro. (16) *Additional comments*: the specimen was intercepted by the divers of the Island Ventures Dive School and taken to 43 m depth in an attempt to keep it alive. It was later dissected on the right side to display the internal organs.

CCC no. 172: (2) *Date of capture*: 8.5.1995 at 2:00 h. (3) *Site of capture*: Hahaya, Grand Comoro. (9) *Length*: about 140 cm. (11) *Condition on capture*: alive when intercepted by the Island Ventures Dive School at about 7:00 h on 8.5.1995 but died soon afterwards. (13) *Condition*: fatally damaged by the insertion of two steel gaffs into the lower jaw, and deep wounds in the dorsal body. (16) *Additional comments*: the specimen was too badly damaged to have been of use for scientific or display purposes and was left with the fishermen.

CCC no. 173: (2) *Date of capture*: 5.8.1995; the shark nets in which the coelacanth was caught are usually set at about 8:30 h and retrieved 24 hours later. (3) *Site of capture*: Anakao, 33 km south of Toliara (Tulear), 18 km south of the Tropic of Capricorn and 9 km south of St. Augustin Bay, on the south-west coast of Madagascar. (4) *Name of fisherman*: ZeZe of the village Soalara in Madagascar. (5) *Distance from shore at capture*: not given. (6) *Depth of capture*: 140–150 m. At a depth of 140 m the sea bottom off Anakao is mostly sand and of low relief (the shark nets are not set in rocky areas as they may become snagged on the rocks and lost. At this site the 200-m depth contour is located about 9 km from shore. (7) *Bait used*: the coelacanth was caught using deep-set shark gill nets 100 m long by 2 m high, with stretched mesh size of about 36 cm. These nets are set in depths of 100–200 m, weighted to hang about one metre above the bottom, and are baited with small fishes to attract sharks. (8) *Weight*: 32 kg. (9) *Length*: 133 cm. Head length: 360 mm; eye diameter: 45 mm. First dorsal-fin spine count: 8; second dorsal-fin rays: 27; anal-fin rays: 29; pectoral-fin rays: 27; dorsal, ventral and epicaudal lobes of the caudal fin each with 24 rays. (10) *Sex*: Not apparent. (11) *Condition on capture*: excellent. (12) *Method of preservation*: the specimen was brought frozen to the Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marines of the University of Toliara, Madagascar, where it was placed in a solution of 10% formalin. The abdominal cavity was opened by an incision along the ventral midline of the body and the internal organs were examined. The gonad was small and the sex was not apparent. The fish is in excellent condition and shows no significant differences in external morphology from specimens examined by Heemstra et al. (1996) from the Comoros. (13) *Condition*: excellent. (14) *First literature reference*: Heemstra et al. (1996). (15) *Current holding*: Institut Halieutique et des Sciences Marines, University of Toliara, Madagascar. (16) *Additional comments*: Details pertaining to the capture of this specimen were obtained by Heemstra et al. (1996) from the Mayor of Anakao, Regis Robinson, local fishermen and a letter from Dominique Couttin, who originally purchased the fish from the fisherman who caught it. Never having seen a coelacanth before, the fisherman (ZeZe) was frightened and was going to throw it back, as all unusual catches are '*fady*' (taboo), because they might be poisonous. The fish was, however, too big and ZeZe decided to take it to show the Mayor, who is an experienced fisherman. Neither the Mayor nor any of the other old, experienced fishermen had seen this species before. The fish was recognised as a coelacanth by Dominique Couttin, who lives at Reunion and visits Anakao twice a year. Couttin purchased the coelacanth from ZeZe for 25 000 Malagasy francs (US$ 6) and immediately took it in her boat to Toliara, where it was placed in a freezer. Before 1993 sharks were regularly caught off Anakao and in St. Augustin Bay with hook and line at depths of 150–250 m. The deep-set shark nets, which were introduced in about 1994, proved to be more productive than hook-and-line fishing, and most fishermen have

switched to this deep-netting method (the same trend led to the first capture of a coelacanth off Indonesia (Erdmann 1999). Weather permitting, some 50 fishermen (usually working in two-man teams) are engaged every day in the deep-set shark net fishery off Anakao. Since none of the local, experienced fishermen had previously seen a coelacanth, it seems unlikely that a resident population occurs off this part of the Madagascar coast. North of Toliara, the continental shelf broadens and the 200-m depth contour is located some 20 or more kilometres from shore. This increased distance to deep water precludes most local fishermen (without motorised canoes) from deep-water fishing. For most of the west coast of Madagascar the continental shelf extends 50–100 km offshore. This broad expanse of shallow-water habitat would prevent local fishermen from fishing at depths frequented by coelacanths. Toliara is about 1300 km south of Grand Comoro and it is feasible that a stray coelacanth was inadvertently carried from Grand Comoro in the prevailing southerly currents that sweep around the north end of Madagascar (Heemstra et al. 1996). Details are awaited on a second coelacanth specimen that was reported to have been caught off Toliara in Madagascar.

CCC no. 174: see report by Erdman (1999).

CCC no. 175: see report by Erdman et al. (1999).

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Michael N. Bruton

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Ichthos

Newsletter of the Society of Friends of the JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology

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To promote an interest in fishes

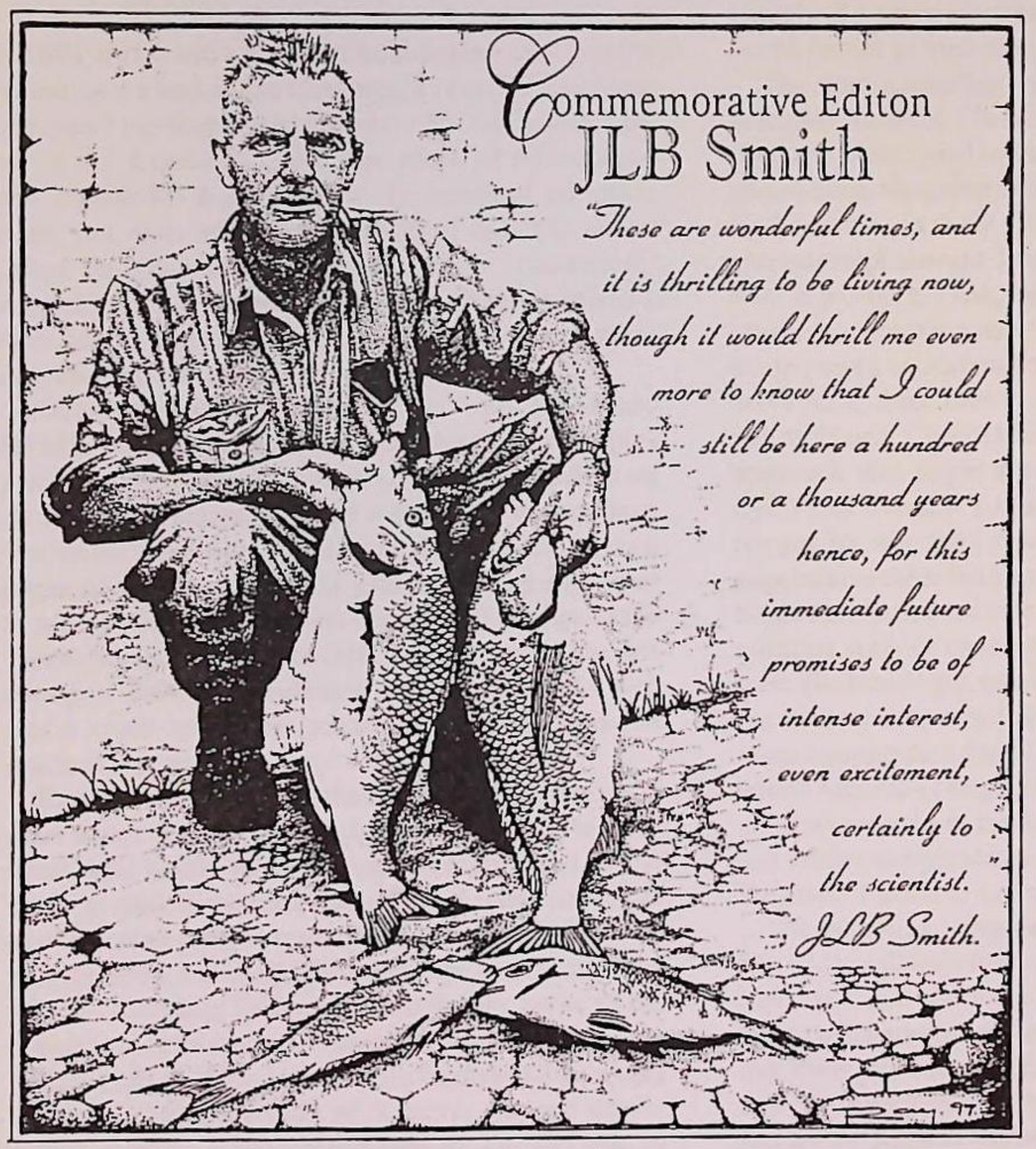
Commemorative Editon
JLB Smith
"These are wonderful times, and it is thrilling to be living now, though it would thrill me even more to know that I could still be here a hundred or a thousand years hence, for this immediate future promises to be of intense interest, even excitement, certainly to the scientist.
JLB Smith.

Figure 2. Title page of the 54th Ichthos Newsletter devoted to 100th birthday of James Leonard Brierley Smith, published by the JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology, Grahamstown.

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Coelacanths on the web

In 1996, a year and a half after establishing a coelacanth resuscitation tank in the Comoros, I attended a seminar on project funding organized by the Philadelphia Chapter of the Explorers Club. One piece of information was repeatedly drummed into the heads of all attendees: you must establish a website. I did. The site is called *http://www.dinofish.com* (because 'coelacanth' is reserved by an engineering firm!). It never raised a dime for the intended project but did lead to some other interesting consequences.

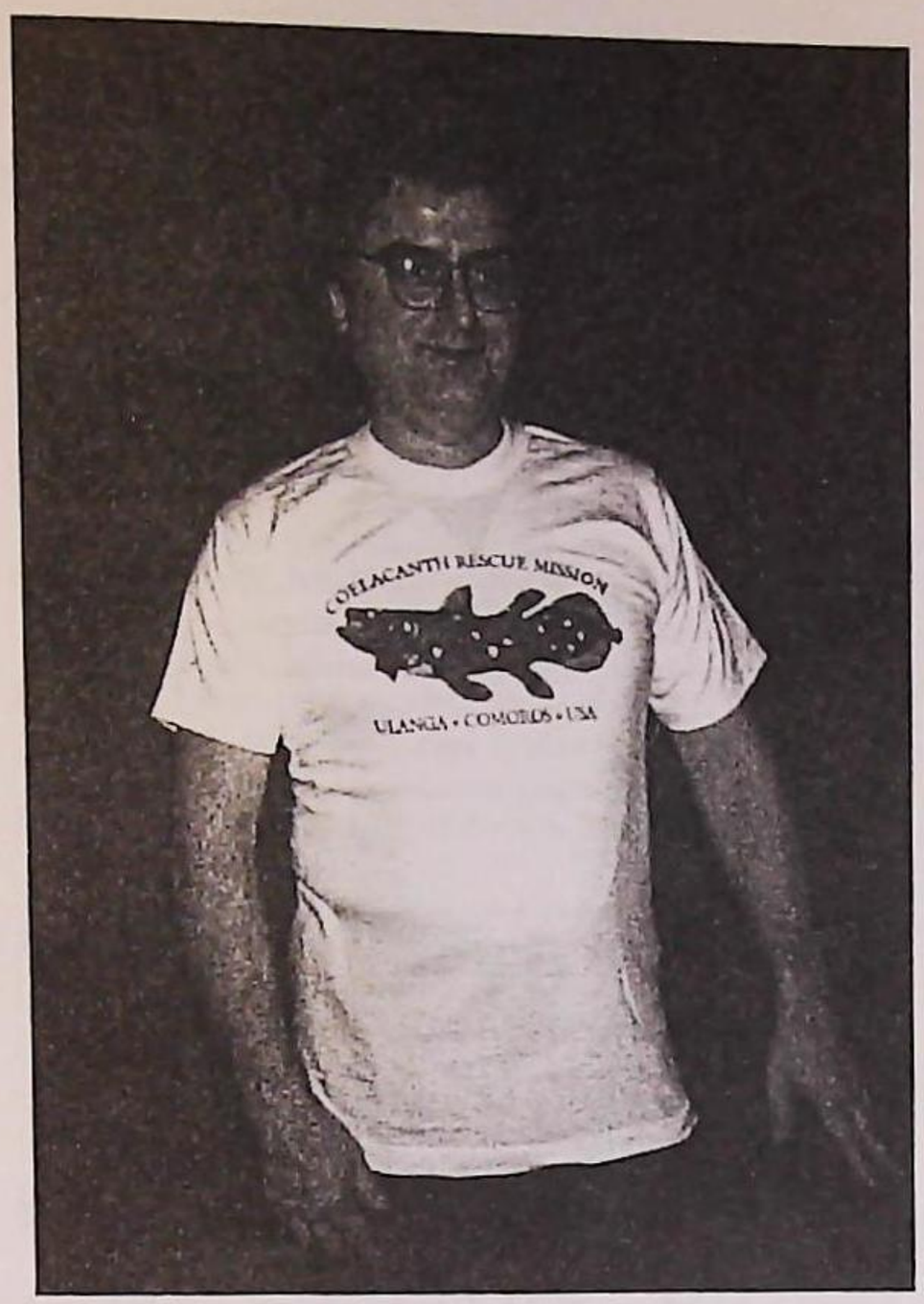
Knowing next to nothing about web pages and HTML, I relied on one of the early text converter programs and learned just enough UNIX commands to set up files on a server. I added a string of keywords, a first crude hand drawn image of the fish, and several pages of informational text gleaned during my years as a coelacanthophile. Then I submitted the site to the Yahoo search engine. *Dinofish.com* went up in the late spring of 1996 to a deafening silence. Either the web was a crock or the coelacanth as presented was not much of a draw.

But then incrementally, the hits started coming. And right away, then as now, many of the e-mail respondents were highly motivated and well informed. Some made graphical contributions. Others were collectors of coelacanth paraphernalia. Still others had stories of strange fishes and coelacanth sightings from around the world – including Indonesia! And finally, some of the coelacanth 'professionals' stumbled onto the site.

In the fall of 1996, I was able to begin adding images to the site with the help of a clever capture device called 'snappy'. I also added a counter. The site won an Omni Cool Science Award. Hits climbed from several a day to about forty. Links were exchanged between *dinofish.com*, the Comoros website, and the Livingstone's bat conservation website. Any event bringing the Comoros or the coelacanth into the news now caused hit 'spikes'. When a hijacked jetliner crash landed off the Galawa hotel at the north end of Grand Comoro, *dinofish* received a thousand hits in one day (CNN had linked to the Comoros site, and the curious linked over.) With an article in the New York Times in the fall of 1997, rehashing old coelacanth information, a similar spike occurred. The biggest of all came on 24 September 1998 when the Indonesian coelacanth was announced. There were 6494 visitors in one 24 hour period! The baseline rate is currently between 150 to 300 hits a day with a drop off on weekends. It is statistically curious that on a given day approximately the same number of people from all over the world decide to visit *dinofish.com*.

The most interesting consequence of the website has been the 'Save the Coelacanth Contest'. Our resuscitation tank – designed to intercept accidental bycatches, revive them, then return them to the sea, was dismantled by Comorans in early 1997 – after only one inconclusive intercept attempt. I was aware of other ideas underway to protect the fish, including establishing a marine preserve, deploying new fish aggregating devices, and setting up an educational center. But, except for the preserve idea, these efforts were also running into funding problems. Could there be some clever, inexpensive approach that might spare the bycatches from fatality? From *dinofish* I solicited ideas, offering a $ 500 reward for any idea that we put into practice. Many suggestions came in from coelacanthophiles of all ages. Some recommended cloning or fish farming or sinking artificial reefs or changing the bait used by the fishermen. (Refreshingly, no one had the presumption to tell the fishermen to stop fishing!) Then, in January 1998, came a suggestion from Dr. Raymond Waldner of Palm beach Atlantic College. Waldner, a biologist, described a technique used to return caught reef fishes to bottom and cooler temperatures with minimal stress. He won the prize. I came to call this technique 'deep release'.

'Deep release' involves the clever use of a barbless fish hook, a fishing line, and some weights. Not exactly high tech, and that's the beauty of it for the Comoros. When a fisherman catches a fish he wants to release, he ties a weighted sack to the eye of a barbless fish hook, and his fishing line to the curve of the hook. He then pushes the point of the inverted hook through the upper lip or lower jaw of the fish and lets the weight lower the



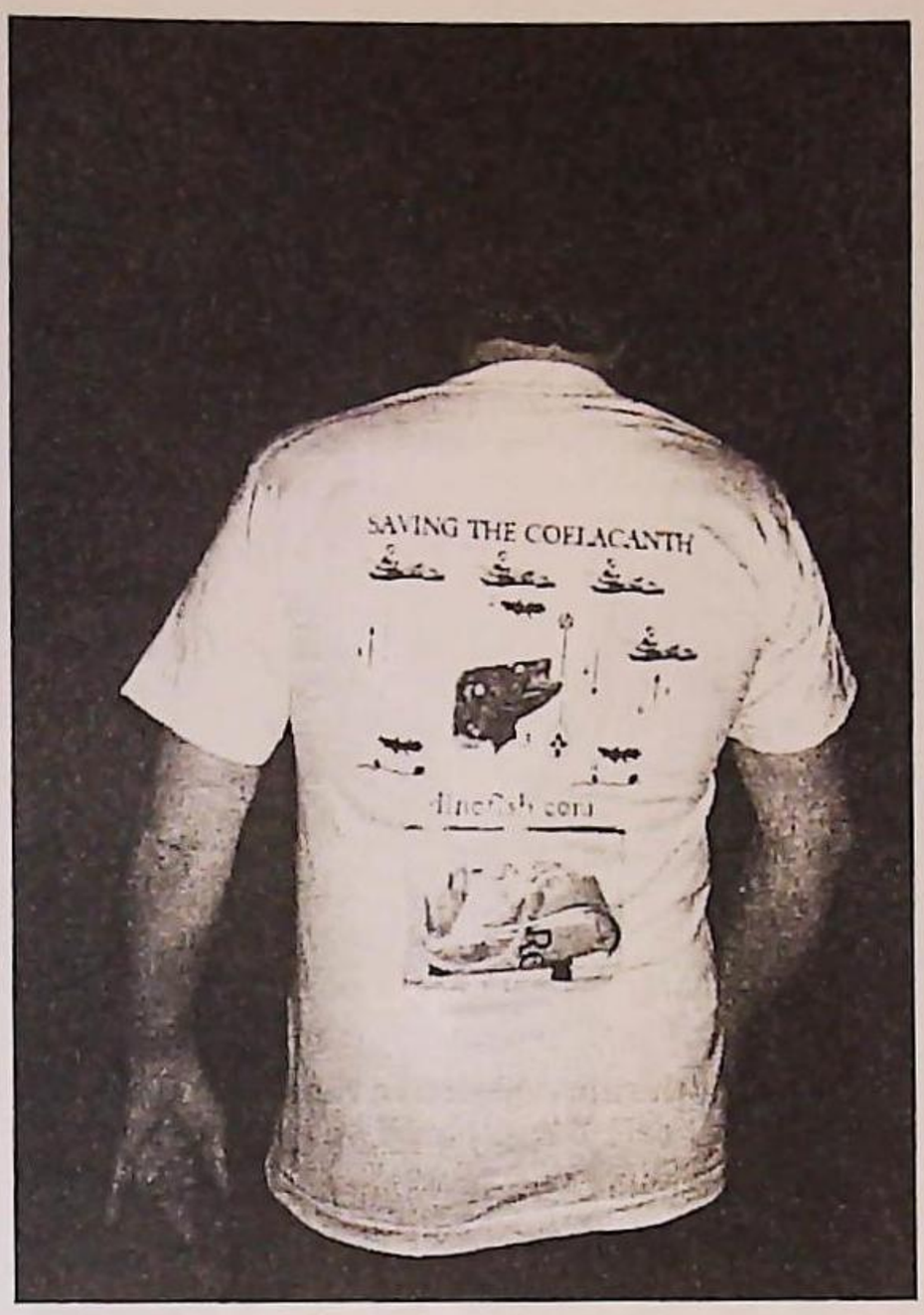


Figure 3. a – 'Deep release' T-shirt designed by J. Hamlin, b – with instructions and the pouch containing the hook, string and bag for sinkers, on the back. Photographs by E.K. Balon.

fish effortlessly to the bottom at which time he tugs the hook out of the creature's mouth with his line, setting it free. The rig is then brought back up for re-use.

'Deep release' seemed very clever, although without tagging, one could not easily verify that a released coelacanth had survived. Nevertheless, in the absence of better alternatives, it was worth trying. The problem was how to deploy such a device in the Comoros in a practical manner. That's when I thought of using T-shirts, an item of clothing often used by Comoran fishermen. The hook would be packaged with a string and plastic bag in a pouch on the back of a T-shirt which was also printed with an illustration of its use (Figure 3). For weight, the fisherman would simply use a few of his sinker stones in the plastic bag.

I designed the T-shirt and had a few hundred produced. With friends, we made about 80 kits sewing them onto the backs of the shirts in ZipLoc freezer pouches. The first boxes went to the Comoros at the end of April 1998 where they languished in customs for more than three months. On 23 August 1998 the Comoran conservation group Ulanga distributed the shirts to fishermen in the preserve area off the southwest coast of Grand Comoro. We await the results.

In the meantime, *dinofish.com* offers the Coelacanth Rescue Mission (CRM) shirts for sale over the internet without the 'deep release' kit. Enough have been sold to pay for sending over another batch. *Dinofish* has added a gift animation of a virtual swimming coelacanth and is about to offer real time video streaming. What began as a failed fund-raising exercise, turned into a fascinating global interaction in which anyone can contribute to the well being of our favorite fish.

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See also other recent websites on the coelacanth

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Eugene K. Balon

New coelacanth coins minted in South Africa

In 1998 the South African Mint produced a South African two Rand, 1/4 oz, 24-carat gold coin depicting the coelacanth. The coin is the second in a paleontological series, the first having depicted the famous human fossil 'Mrs Ples' in 1997. The coelacanth coin measures 22 mm in diameter and weighs 7.777 g. The first coin in the coelacanth series was presented to Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, discoverer of the first coelacanth that became known to science, at a moving ceremony at the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town, South Africa. Mike Bruton thanked the Mint on behalf of the Aquarium for choosing the coelacanth as a theme for their coin, which commemorates the 60th anniversary of the capture of the first coelacanth, and introduced Dr. Courtenay-Latimer. Marjorie, sprightly and alert despite her 92 years, gave an amusing and thoughtful speech on how the coelacanth had changed her life (Figure 4). While at the Aquarium she voiced her support for displaying a coelacanth in captivity. The coelacanth gold coin can be obtained from the South African Mint, P.O. Box 8850, Centurion 0046, South Africa or from Coin & Currency, P.O. Box 1057, Clifton, NJ 07014, U.S.A. (e-mail: coincurin@aol.com).

Figure 4. Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer receiving a coelacanth gold coin at the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town. The coin was produced by the South African Mint in 1998. Photograph by M.N. Bruton.

Coelacanths on stamps

The living coelacanth has now appeared on the postage stamps of at least eight countries, with recent issues produced by North Korea, Ivory Coast, Guyana, Kuwait, and Turks & Caicos (Figure 5a) raising the eyebrows of philatelists and scientists alike. *Latimeria chalumnae* has been depicted on the postage stamps of the following countries: Comoros (1950, 1954, 1973, 1975, and 1998 through the WWF-International), Ivory Coast (1979), South Africa (1989), North Korea (1993), Malagasy (Madagascar 1982, 1990, 1993, 1994), Guyana (1996), Kuwait (1997) and Turks & Caicos (1997). The appearance of the coelacanth on stamps from Malagasy predated their scientific discovery there (Figure 5b). Do the issues from Ivory Coast (possibly), North Korea (unlikely, but less so after the Indonesian discovery), Guyana (an exciting possibility), Kuwait (highly unlikely) and Turks & Caicos (unlikely) suggest that coelacanths may occur

Figure 5. a – Coelacanth and the 'Jago' research submersible on a stamp issued to celebrate underwater research by Turks & Caicos in 1997. b – Coelacanth stamp issued by the Democratic Republic of Malagasy (Madagascar) in 1993.

off these countries as well? Can we look forward to an Indonesian coelacanth stamp?

Further information on coelacanths on stamps can be obtained from Glynn Peacock (glyn@alpha.futurenet.co.za), Mike Bruton (bruton_m@mtn.co.za) or Vic Springer (springer.victor@nmnh.si.edu), or through the Coelacanth Stamp Collectors Club at e-mail: coelacanthstamps@listbot.com. Their website address is http://members.tripod.com/~Coelastamp/index.html. In addition, join the Fossil Stamp Club, founded in 1996 by Mario Galan (mario_galan@hotmail.com) of the El Salvador Philatelic Society. The website for the Fossil Stamp Club is http://clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/fossilstampclub.

Several years ago I purchased some stamps depicting the American channel catfish from Gambia, a long, thin country in west Africa astride the Gambia River. On further enquiry I found out that *Ictalurus punctatus* had been introduced into the Gambia by a well known American fisheries scientist, and was now one of the commonest fishes in the Gambia River, hence its appearance on an African stamp! Ichthyologists can pick up interesting hints on fish distributions from postage stamps!

Books on the coelacanth

At least three, probably more, popular books on the coelacanth are in preparation. The least technical, but hopefully the most attractive to young readers, is Mike Bruton's 'The Four-Legged Fish', published by Cambridge University Press and available through all good booksellers and from bookstores online.

Michael N. Bruton

Obfuscation of events in the public domain: the discovery of the living coelacanth

The discovery of *Latimeria chalumnae* J.L.B. Smith, 1939 has elicited many millenium-like superlatives, the least of which is that of being the most romantic biological discovery on record. Can you think of any other event in the history of Biology that has excited and delighted a greater number of people? Rapture, however, is often inextricably intertwined with fantasy, and the coelacanth saga has suffered more than its share of both inadvertent and willful exaggeration and distortion.

Consider the behavior of the first recorded live coelacanth, as described by the man who caught it. When Captain Hendrik Goosen made his way around the pile of marine animals, seaweeds, and debris, which had been dumped onto the deck of his trawler, in order to get a better look at a large, queer fish, he noticed that it was still alive. 'I lifted its lip and it snapped its mouth

shut', he wrote fifty years later. During an interview a few months after this, he amplified his recollection. 'I lifted up its lip to have a look at its teeth, and it snapped its jaw shut. It didn't bite me, or anything like that. It just snapped its jaw shut. It didn't like me opening its mouth' (Greenwell 1989). These remarks evidently were directed at persons who gratuitously had elaborated on the fish's response. When Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, curator of the East London Museum, had arrived dockside to see whether she wanted to add a unique but oversized specimen to her collection, the only trawlerman on hand had told her that the fish 'snapped at the captain's fingers as he looked at it in the trawler net' (Courtenay- Latimer 1979). Moreover, Professor J.L.B. Smith himself had further embellished this piscine performance, in the introduction to his detailed scientific description of the fish's anatomy. 'Despite all that had endured the coelacanth was alive, and so vigorous as to be aggressive, snapping viciously at nearby hands (Smith 1940). In his popular, widely distributed, autobiographical book, the Professor put the finishing touches on Captain Goosen's firsthand encounter with a coelacanth by declaring that 'when he touched the body, it heaved itself up suddenly, snapping its jaws viciously and had nearly caught his hand in its formidable fang-lined mouth' (Smith 1956).

Over the years, the principal participants in this extended drama occasionally have had trouble keeping their own roles straight. The most controversial event of all has turned out to be introduction of the freshly-mounted coelacanth to Professor Smith eight weeks after its capture. According to Smith and his wife, Margaret, there was no one else in the room when they first saw the specimen, except for the caretaker who had ushered them in (Smith 1956, Smith, M.M. 1970). Curator Courtenay-Latimer's two published accounts, however, mention only the Professor and state that she showed him the mount, which had been placed on a large table, as soon as he walked into her office (Courtenay-Latimer 1979, 1989). Moreover, during an interview, she became passionately indignant when reminded that in his book, the Professor had written that she had been 'out for the moment' when he and his wife arrived at her Museum in order to see the fish for the first time (Greenwell 1989). Both the Professor and the Curator felt that there was much at stake concerning the outcome of this long-delayed encounter. Would the specimen actually be a species of coelacanth? Had Smith correctly interpreted Courtenay-Latimer's rough sketch and the few scales she had sent to him? For her part, she wondered if he would approve of the way the specimen had been prepared, unfortunately under the most difficult circumstances. Most of all, suddenly to be forced to face the awesome responsibility of handling properly what must have seemed the world's most palpable oxymoron, a four-and-a-half foot living fossil, may help explain these disparate memories.

The most egregious errors of remembrance, however, have been the ones committed by persons who believed they were thoroughly familiar with the coelacanth story but were not. Recently, Wade Roush (1997) declared that coelacanths did not become generally known until 'in 1938, anglers off the Comoro Islands in the Indian Ocean stunned the scientific world by catching a live coelacanth, the first of many'. In attempting to correct this misunderstanding, Charles S. Churcher (1997) then became utterly confused. 'The first specimen of a modern coelacanth was recovered by a commercial trawler off the coast of South Africa on 22 December 1938. It was taken off the mouth of the Chalumna River, Eastern Cape Province, and located by Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, of the East London Museum, in the local fish market. J.L.B. Smith, Senior Lecturer in Chemistry at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, was the officiating ichthyologist at the museum, but was away in Johannesburg at the time. Consequently, Miss Latimer saved only the head and the skin of the rotting fish, as she recognized it as peculiar but not as a coelacanth. Smith subsequently named it *Latimeria chalumnae* in her honor and to record its provenience'. Such is the price of fame, or careless editing, or both.

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